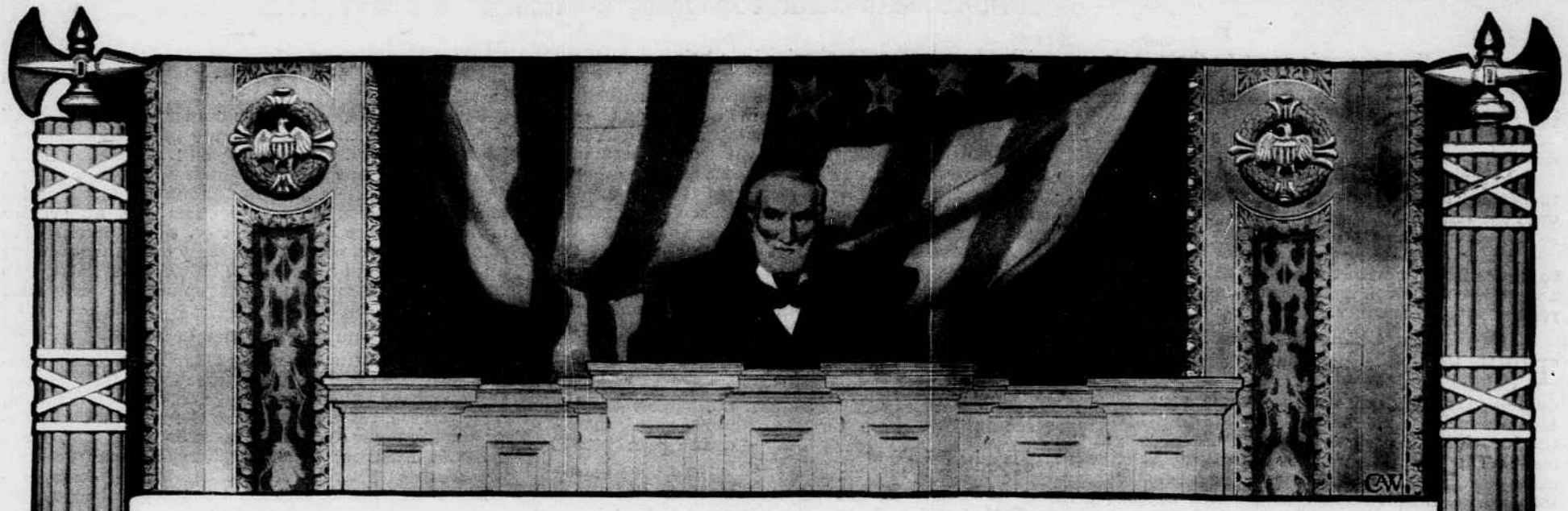

# FROM THE SPEAKER'S DESK

By the Secretary to Speaker Cannon

## L. WHITE BUSBEY

THE average man is looking at the world through a knot-hole, and the good Lord will have to put eyes in the back of his head if he is to see more than the circle of his desires," says the Speaker, as he smiles philosophically down upon the conflict of ideas as to what shall be written into the national law.

Indeed, the House of Representatives suggests a great exchange where the interests and ambitions of eighty millions of American people are brought for valuation. Here, it might be said, come the promoters of moral as well as material securities, and here the bulls and bears contest every move on the floor, until in the clash of interests there is a fusing of ideas that brings the composite legislation most acceptable to all the people from Maine to California, and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico—those who inhabit the great marts of trade and those who dwell on the farm, those who sweat in the great factories and those who delve in the mines—who make up the people's government in the United States of America.

Into this political exchange, where we seek to verify Blackstone's definition that "Law is the embodiment of the moral sense of the people," are finally brought all the ideas and aspirations of the American people to contest with each other the right to be written into the law, and the test of each and all must be the will of the majority—not simply the majority of the three hundred and eighty-six members on the floor, but the majority sentiment of the country; for these members are only Representatives reflecting the will of the people who elected them to Congress.

### The Governmental Fanning-Mill

THERE are three hundred and eighty-six Representatives in the House, and perhaps no two of them have identical interests to represent, or identical demands from their constituents. Each of these members represents two hundred thousand population, a mighty army, with a mighty force of public opinion, to impress upon that member that right must rest with the voice of the multitude in his own district. As a result there are more than fifteen thousand bills now before the House of Representatives, and these embrace enough proposed legislation to almost make over entirely the revised statutes and the Constitution itself, and also amend the Decalogue. They run the whole gamut of legislative ideas, from national divorce to Sunday observance, and from trust-busting to the prevention of barber's itch. Many of these bills may appear ridiculous to all except their promoters, and behind each is a reputable constituency which has a right to a voice in a government of the people. Therefore, it is necessary to have this central exchange where must be developed the resultant of the forces of civilization and let the statutes be written in accord with the will of the majority.

A year ago there seemed to be a general demand for revision of the tariff, and it came from many sections. The demands, however, were not all alike. Tariff revision had different meanings in different States.

A prominent Massachusetts member entered the Speaker's room and said: "Mr. Speaker, we can settle this tariff agitation in a week. There need be no extra session nor any general tariff revision. We can settle the whole question by a few simple amendments to the Dingley law, and adopt those in the closing week of this session, and then go home with the people entirely satisfied."

"And what are these amendments to be?" asked the Speaker.

"Free hides, free coal, free wool, and reciprocity with Canada," said the Massachusetts member.

"Your suggestion is worth consideration, and I'll turn it over in my mind," replied the Speaker.

As the Massachusetts man passed out of the Speaker's room an Illinois member entered, and with the enthusiasm of a discoverer exclaimed: "Mr. Speaker, we can settle this tariff agitation in short order. We can do it in a week, before the close of this session, save an extra session, and quiet the people."

"You are the man we are looking for," said the Speaker dryly. "How do you propose to do it?"

"Why, we don't need any general tariff revision. All we need is a few simple amendments to the Dingley schedules, and they will be all right and entirely satisfactory."

"And those amendments?"

"A reduction of the tariff on steel, on cotton and woolen goods, and reciprocity with Germany."

### An Example of Tariff Harmony

YES, R. of Massachusetts has the same idea, with a difference as to amendments," said the Speaker. "He, too, thinks a few simple amendments will make the Dingley schedules all right, and it is encouraging to find one point of absolute agreement between Massachusetts and Illinois; but his amendments are not the same as yours."

"What amendments does R. want?" asked the Illinois member.

"Only free hides, free coal, free wool, and reciprocity with Canada."

"Great Scott!" shouted the Illinois man, "he's not fit to represent any loyal and intelligent constituency. Free hides, free coal, free wool, and reciprocity with Canada! Why, anyone of them would spell Ruin to the country. We'll stay here till Doomsday before we'll grant one of them."

And as he slammed the door behind him the Speaker remarked: "Another ideal shattered. A few simple amendments adopted in a week won't settle the tariff agitation. What a contest there will be before the Ways and Means Committee, on the floor, and in the country when this question is opened! And what will be the result? We had better stand pat on what we have than open a battle of schedules of which no man can guess the result."

Occasionally opposition of interests begets impatience and the spirit of revolt from established methods. Then we have "insurgents." Insurgents are sometimes made by individual independence, sometimes by pressure from home, sometimes by disappointment over committee assignments, and sometimes by failure in securing legislation through ignorance of methods of procedure. A Western member who defended his insurrectionary attitude on the Statehood bill by denouncing the autocratic power of the Speaker, afterward sought recognition for unanimous consent to take up an appropriation bill. The Speaker refused, because it was both unnecessary and improper. The insurgent could see no other way, though there was a plain rule covering his case, under which he could bring up his bill. He fretted and fumed over his failure, until one day when the House was on the call of committees. The Speaker waited for the insurgent to call up his bill, as others who understood parliamentary procedure were doing. He finally sent his clerk to prompt the insurgent, and the clerk found him in the restaurant abusing the Speaker's autocratic power.

"Why are you not on the floor to call up your bill?" was asked.

"Because the Speaker won't recognize me for unanimous consent."

"You don't need unanimous consent. You have a right to move to go into Committee of the Whole on your bill."

The insurgent, still complaining and refusing to believe, went on the floor, and arriving just at the close of a roll-call, shouted: "Mr. Speaker!"

"The gentleman from Wisconsin," replied the Speaker.

"I move that the House resolve itself into the Committee of the Whole to consider H. R. 345."

The motion prevailed and the bill was passed, as it might have been passed on any other committee day, had the insurgent known how to proceed. But he had conceded to the Speaker the autocratic power he complained of, and had not sought his rights under the rules.

### Hysteria Among the Constituents

THE House, being the coördinate branch of the Government directly representative of the people, is naturally the most impressionable body in Washington. Telegrams from home have the same effect on members that they have on anxious mothers away from home, and though these telegraphic demands may come from people to them unknown, they feel the immediate shock of the electric touch with their home districts, because it may indicate a sudden change in sentiment there. A sudden case of colic in the family is just as alarming to the young mother as the symptoms of scarlet fever, and a case of hysteria at home, even in the person of some one unknown to the new member, is just as alarming to him as the development of serious uprising in behalf of a great principle.

The contest over the Statehood bill developed just such a condition. After the Senate had amended this bill by striking out the provision for bringing Arizona and New Mexico into the Union as one State, there suddenly came a perfect avalanche of telegrams on the House, demanding concurrence in the Senate amendments. No one knew the cause of this sudden turn of the electric wires on the House, and the new members were almost in a panic. A little examination showed that these telegrams were in language as like each other as are the stereotyped petitions that are printed by a central bureau and distributed over the country, with the request that they be sent "to your Representative."

The yellow-and-white telegraph slips came to the Speaker's room even more abundantly than to members on the floor. Where each member received a score of messages, the Speaker received hundreds, because he received duplicates of all sent to the whole membership of the House. There was little variation in them. All were couched in the same terms, except those sent by men who knew and were known to the Speaker. These read: "I have been requested to wire you to use your influence to have the House concur in Senate amendments to Statehood bill. Do as you please." The telegrams were inspired from Washington. A group of new members brought their